

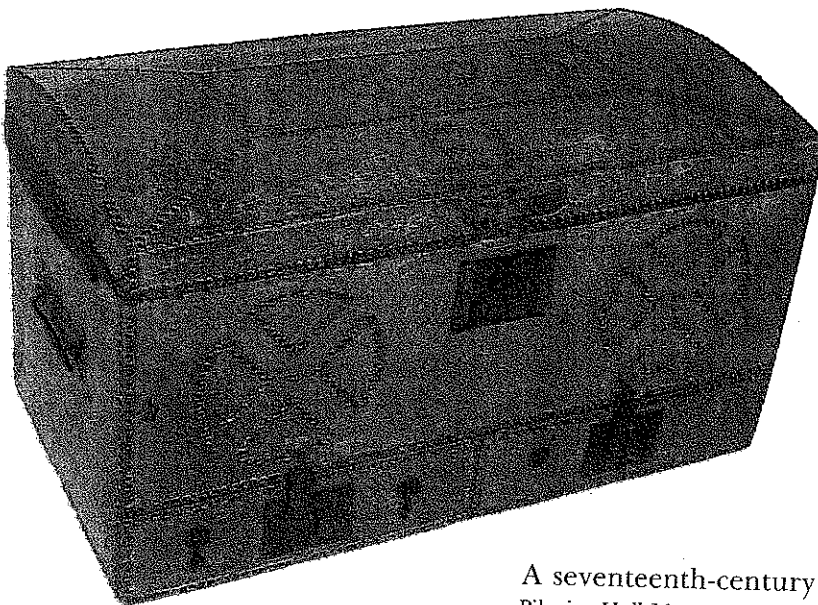
SARAH KEMBLE
KNIGHT
1666–1727

Reading the eighteenth-century Bostonian Sarah Kemble Knight, we may recall the intelligence and ability of Anne Bradstreet fifty years earlier. Madam Knight managed to be both a schoolteacher and a businesswoman. She not only taught writing (one of her pupils may have been young Benjamin Franklin), but also took in lodgers at her house, apparently ran a stationery store, and later became the owner of several farms and an inn.

This unusual woman remains known today for an unusual feat. Early in October, 1704, at the age of thirty-eight, she took a business trip from Boston to New York and back. The fact may not seem remarkable. But at the time travel by land meant wearying hours on horseback through dense woods, and swift streams to cross by night—"enough," as she wrote, "to startle a more masculine courage." With stops for rest, work, and sightseeing, her journey took five months, twice as long as it took Columbus to reach America from Spain.

Madam Knight found the crude state of civilization scarcely more friendly to her than nature. The few poor inns along the way allowed her no choice of where to stay or what to eat. She was forced to spend one night in a collapsing house whose door was tied on with cord and whose floor was the bare earth. Other times she had to sleep on mattresses stuffed with corncobs, and dine on some strange "twisted thing like a cable" topped by mysterious purple sauce. When she found the food completely inedible, she paid for it but left it, so that her dinner was "only smell."

However weary, frightened, or hungry, Madam Knight enjoyed observing how other people lived, and she recorded her trip in a journal. It describes the customs and manners of small rural communities and solitary settlers in the backwoods, as well as of aspiring cities like New Haven and New York. The liveliness of her journal comes not only from what she sees but also from her way of seeing it. Her courage and practicality allowed her to deal with and report on the dangers of the frontier. But her literary education and an element of romance in her character led her also to feel and remark on its appeal to her imagination. As a well-bred inhabitant of the growing city of Boston, too, she was fascinated and amused by what seemed to her the coarseness of life in the wilderness and the provinces. The combination in her of the keen social observer, the romantic traveler, and the urbanite, makes her journal by turns realistic, poetic, and funny.



A seventeenth-century trunk.
Pilgrim Hall Museum, Plymouth, Massachusetts

FROM
The Journal of Madam Knight

On a Journey from Boston to New York,
in the Year 1704



Tuesday, October the third.

About eight in the morning, I with the post¹ proceeded forward without observing anything remarkable, and about two, afternoon, arrived at the post's second stage, where the western post met him and exchanged letters. Here having called for something to eat, the woman brought in a twisted thing like a cable, but something whiter; and laying it on the board, tugged for life to bring it into a capacity to spread; which having with great pains accomplished, she served in a dish of pork and cabbage, I suppose the remains of dinner. The sauce was of a deep purple, which I thought was boil'd in her dye kettle. The bread was Indian, and everything on the table service agreeable to these. I, being hungry, got a little down; but my stomach was soon cloy'd, and what cabbage I swallowed serv'd me for a cud² the whole day after.

Having here discharged the ordinary³ for myself and guide (as I understood was the custom), about three, afternoon, went on with my third guide, who rode very hard; and having crossed Providence Ferry, we came to a river which they generally rode thro'. But I dared not venture. So the post got a lad and canoe to carry me to t'other side, and he rid thro' and led my horse. The canoe was very small and shallow, so that when we were in, she seem'd ready to take in water, which greatly terrified me, and caused me to be very

circumspect, sitting with my hands fast on each side, my eyes steady, not daring so much as to lodge my tongue a hair's breadth more on one side of my mouth than t'other, nor so much as think on Lot's wife,⁴ for a wry thought would have overset our wherry.⁵ But I was soon put out of this pain, by feeling the canoe on shore, which I as soon almost saluted with my feet, and rewarding my sculler,⁶ again mounted and made the best of our way forwards. The road here was very even and the day pleasant, it being now near sunset. But the post told me we had nearly fourteen miles to ride to the next stage (where we were to lodge). I asked him of the rest of the road, foreseeing we must travel in the night. He told me there was a bad river we were to ride thro', which was so very fierce a horse could sometime hardly stem⁷ it; but it was but narrow, and we should soon be over. I cannot express the concern of mind this relation set me in: no thoughts but those of the dangerous river could entertain my imagination, and they were as formidable as various, still tormenting me with blackest ideas of my approaching fate—sometimes seeing myself drowning, otherwhiles drowned, and at the best like a holy sister just come out of a spiritual bath in dripping garments.

Now was the Glorious Luminary,⁸ with his

4. **Lot's wife:** In the Old Testament, Lot's wife looked back as the city of Sodom was being destroyed, and was turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 29:1–26).

5. **a wry thought . . . wherry:** that is, our small rowing boat would have been overturned by so much as an out-of-the-way thought.

6. **sculler:** rower.

7. **stem:** make headway against.

8. **Glorious Luminary . . . :** that is, the sun had set.

1. **post:** mail carrier.

2. **cud:** something to chew on.

3. **discharged the ordinary:** paid for the food.

swift coursers, arrived at his stage, leaving poor me with the rest of this part of the lower world in darkness, with which we were soon surrounded. The only glimmering we now had was from the spangled skies, whose imperfect reflections rendered every object formidable. Each lifeless trunk, with its shatter'd limbs, appear'd an armed enemy, and every stump like a ravenous devourer. Nor could I so much as discern my guide, when at any distance, which added to the terror.

Thus, absolutely lost in thought, and dying with the very thoughts of drowning, I came up with the post, who I did not see until even with his horse. He told me he stopped for me, and we rode on very deliberately a few paces, when we entered a thicket of trees and shrubs, and I perceived by the horse's going, we were on the descent of a hill, which, as we came nearer the bottom, was totally dark with the trees that surrounded it. But I knew by the going of the horse we had entered the water, which my guide told me was the hazardous river he had told me of; and he, riding up close to my side, bid me not fear—we should be over immediately. I now rallied all the courage I was mistress of, knowing that I must either venture my fate of drowning, or be left like the children in the wood.⁹ So, as the post bid me, I gave reins to my nag, and sitting as steady as just before in the canoe, in a few minutes got safe to the other side, which he told me was the Narragansett country.

Here we found great difficulty in traveling, the way being very narrow, and on each side the trees and bushes giving us very unpleasant welcomes with their branches and boughs, which we could not avoid, it being so exceeding dark. My guide, as before so now, put on harder than I, with my weary bones, could follow, so left me and the way behind him. Now returned my distressed apprehensions of the place where I was: the dolesome woods, my company next to none, going I knew not

whither, and encompassed with terrifying darkness—the least of which was enough to startle a more masculine courage. Added to which the reflections, as in the afternoon of the day before, that my call¹⁰ was very questionable, which until then I had not so prudently as I ought considered. Now, coming to the foot of a hill, I found great difficulty in ascending; but being got to the top, was there amply recompensed with the friendly appearance of the Kind Conductress of the night,¹¹ just then advancing above the horizontal line. The raptures which the sight of that fair planet produced in me, caused me, for the moment, to forget my present weariness and past toils, and inspired me for most of the remaining way with very diverting thoughts, some of which, with the other occurrences of the day, I reserved to note down when I should come to my stage. My thoughts on the sight of the moon were to this purpose:

*Fair Cynthia,¹² all the homage that I may
Unto a creature, unto thee I pay.
In lonesome woods to meet so kind a guide,
To me's worth more than all the world beside.
Some joy I felt just now, when safe got o'er
Yon surly river to this rugged shore,
Deeming rough welcomes from these clownish trees
Better than lodgings with Nereidees.¹³
Yet swelling fears surprise; all dark appears—
Nothing but light can dissipate those fears.
My fainting vitals can't lend strength to say,
But softly whisper, O I wish 'twere day.
The murmur hardly warm'd the ambient¹⁴ air,
E're thy bright aspect rescues from despair:
Makes the old hag her sable mantle loose,
And a bright joy does through my soul diffuse.
The boisterous trees now lend a passage free,
And pleasant prospects thou givest light to see.*

10. **call:** prompting, that is, my wish to make the journey.

11. **Kind Conductress:** the moon, which lights up her path.

12. **Fair Cynthia:** the moon, personified as a goddess.

13. **Nereidees:** Nereids (nîr'ē-îdz), daughters of the mythological water god Nereus; sea nymphs.

14. **ambient:** encircling.

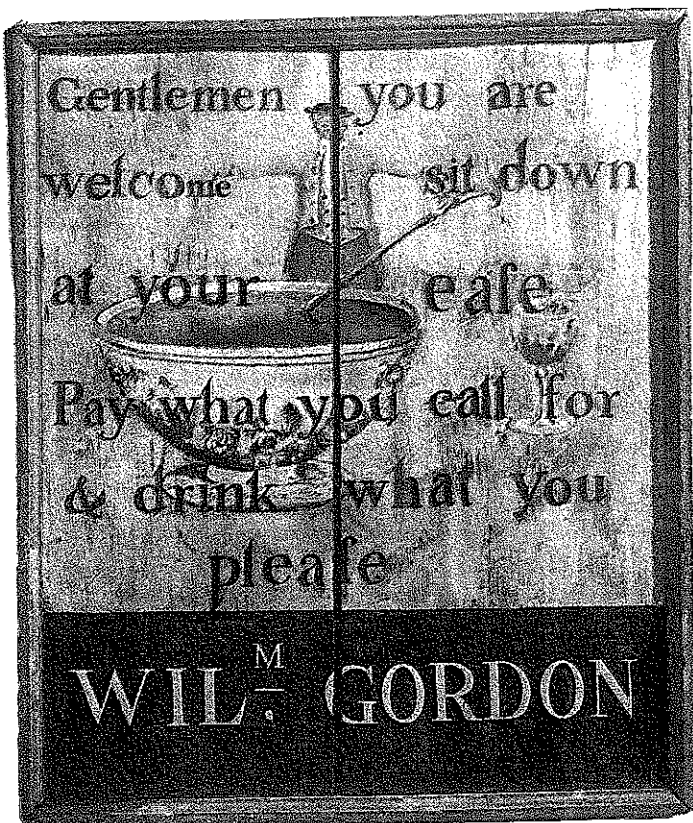
From hence we kept on, with more ease than before: the way being smooth and even, the night warm and serene, and the tall and thick trees at a distance, especially when the moon glared light through the branches, fill'd my imagination with the pleasant delusion of a sumptuous city, fill'd with famous buildings and churches, with their spiring steeples, balconies, galleries and I know not what—grandeurs which I had heard of, and which the stories of foreign countries had given me the idea of:

*Here stood a lofty church—there is a steeple,
And there the grand parade—O see the people!
That famous castle there, were I but nigh,
To see the moat and bridge, and walls so high—
They're very fine! says my deluded eye.*

Being thus agreeably entertained without a thought of anything but thoughts themselves,

I on a sudden was roused from these pleasing imaginations by the post's sounding his horn, which assured me he was arrived at the stage, where we were to lodge; and that music was then most musical and agreeable to me. . . .

Saturday, October the seventh. We set out early in the morning, and being something unacquainted with the way, having asked it of some we met, they told us we must ride a mile or two and turn down a lane on the right hand, and by their direction we rode on. But not yet



coming to the turning, we met a young fellow and asked him how far it was to the lane which turn'd down towards Guilford. He said we must ride a little further, and turn down by the corner of Uncle Sam's lot. My guide vented his spleen¹⁵ at the lubber; and we soon after came into the road, and keeping still on, without anything further remarkable, about two a clock afternoon we arrived at New Haven. . . .

They are governed by the same laws as we in Boston (or little differing) throughout this whole colony of Connecticut, and much the same way of church government, and many of them good, sociable people, and I hope religious too; but a little too much independent in their principles, and, as I have been told, were formerly in their zeal very rigid in their administrations toward such as their laws made offenders, even to a harmless kiss or innocent merriment among young people. Whipping

15. **vented his spleen:** displayed his anger.

being a frequent and counted an easy punishment, about which, as other crimes, the judges were absolute in their sentences. . . .

Their diversions in this part of the country are on Lecture Days and Training Days mostly.¹⁶ On the former there is riding from town to town. And on Training Days the youth divert themselves by shooting at the target, as they call it (but it very much resembles a pillory), where he that hits nearest the white has some yards of red ribbon presented him, which being tied to his hatband, the two ends streaming down his back, he is led away in triumph, with great applause, as the winners

16. **Lecture Days:** midweek religious lectures, held on Thursdays; **Training Days:** days set for military drills.

Colonial inn signs. The first inscription reads: "Gentlemen you are welcome sit down at your ease. Pay what you call for & drink what you please."



of the Olympic Games. They generally marry very young—the males oftener, as I am told, under twenty than above. They generally make public weddings, and have a way something singular (as they say) in some of them, *viz.* just before joining hands, the bridegroom quits the place, who is soon followed by the bridesmen, and as it were dragged back to duty—being the reverse to the former practice among us, to steal Mrs.' pride. . . .¹⁷

Being at a merchant's house, in comes a tall country fellow, with his *alfogeos*¹⁸ full of tobacco; for they seldom lose their cud, but keep chewing and spitting as long as their eyes are open. He advanced to the middle of the room, made an awkward nod, and spitting a large deal of aromatic tincture, he gave a scrape with his shovel-like shoe, leaving a small shovel full of dirt on the floor; made a full stop, hugging his own pretty body with his hands under his arms, stood staring round him, like a cat let out of a basket. At last, like the creature Balaam rode on,¹⁹ he opened his mouth and said: "Have you any ribbenen for hatbands to sell I pray?" The questions and answers about the pay being past, the ribbon is brought and opened. Bumpkin Simpvers cries: "It's confounded gay, I vow." And beckoning to the door, in comes Joan Tawdry, dropping about fifty curtsies, and stands by him. He shows her the ribbon. "*Law you,*" says she, "*it's right Gent,* do you take it, *tis dreadful pretty.*" Then she inquires, "*Have you any hood silk I pray?*" Which being brought and bought, "Have you any *thread silk to sew it with,*" says she, which being accommodated with they departed. They generally stand after they come in a great while speechless, and sometimes don't say a word till

they are asked what they want, which I impute to the awe they stand in of the merchants, who they are constantly almost indebted to, and must take what they bring without liberty to choose for themselves. But they serve them as well, making the merchants stay long enough for their pay.

We may observe here the great necessity and benefit both of education and conversation. For these people have as large a portion of mother wit, and sometimes a larger, than those who have been brought up in cities, but for want of improvements render themselves almost ridiculous, as above. I should be glad if they would leave such follies, and am sure all that love clean houses (at least) would be glad on't too. . . .

Around December 8, Madam Knight reaches New York.

The city of New York is a pleasant, well compacted place, situated on a commodious river which is a fine harbor for shipping. The buildings brick generally, very stately and high, though not altogether like ours in Boston. The bricks in some of the houses are of diverse colors and laid in checkers, being glazed look very agreeable. The inside of them are neat to admiration, the wooden work—for only the walls are plastered—and the summers and gists²⁰ are planed and kept very white scoured, as so is all the partitions if made of boards. . . .

They are generally of the Church of England and have a New England gentleman for their minister, and a very fine church set out with all customary requisites. There are also a Dutch, and diverse conventicles,²¹ as they call them, *viz.* Baptist, Quakers, &c. They are not strict in keeping the Sabbath as in Boston and other places where I had been, but seem to deal with great exactness as far as I see or deal with. They are sociable to one another and courteous and civil to strangers, and fare well

17. **Mrs.' pride:** Madam Knight's meaning seems to be that weddings in Boston featured the same practice—only there the bride was "dragged back to duty," to soften her pride.

18. **alfogeos** (āl-fō'jī-ōs): saddlebags, but here used comically to mean cheeks.

19. **creature Balaam rode on:** referring to the donkey owned by the Biblical prophet Balaam (bā'lēm). After Balaam beat the animal three times, God inspired it to speak and to reprove Balaam (Numbers 22–24).

20. **summers and gists:** beams and joints.

21. **conventicles:** religious meetings.



Mrs. Elizabeth Freake and Baby Mary (c. 1674). Oil on canvas. Artist Unknown.

in their houses. The English go very fashionable in their dress. But the Dutch, especially the middling sort, differ from our women, in their habit go loose, wear French mouches, which are like a cap and a headband in one, leaving their ears bare, which are set out with

jewels of a large size and many in number. And their fingers hooped with rings, some with large stones in them of many colors, as were their pendants in their ears, which you should see very old women wear as well as young.

They have vendues²² very frequently and make their earnings very well by them, for they treat with good liquor liberally, and the customers drink as liberally and generally pay for't as well, by paying for that which they bid up briskly for, after the sack²³ has gone plentifully about, tho' sometimes good penny-worths are got there. Their diversions in the winter is riding sleighs about three or four miles out of town, where they have houses of entertainment at a place called the Bowery, and some go to friends' houses who handsomely treat them. Mr. Burroughs²⁴ carried his spouse and daughter and myself out to one Madame Downes, a gentlewoman that lived at a farmhouse, who gave us a handsome entertainment of five or six dishes and choice beer and metheglin,²⁵ cider, &c., all of which she said was the produce of her farm. I believe we met fifty or sixty sleighs that day. They fly with great swiftness, and some are so furious that they'll turn out of the path for none except a loaded cart. Nor do they spare for any diversion the place affords, and sociable to a degree, their tables being as free to their neighbors as to themselves.

22. **vendues** (vēn-dōōz', -dyōōz'): public sales or auctions.
 23. **sack**: wine imported from Spain.
 24. **Mr. Burroughs**: a New York merchant.
 25. **metheglin** (mə-thĕg'lin): a drink made of honey and water.

Reading Check

1. Who was Madam Knight's guide on the journey to Connecticut?
2. Which of the hazards of travel did Madam Knight most dread?
3. What did she learn about wedding customs in New Haven?
4. What forms of entertainment did she observe in New York?

For Study and Discussion

Analyzing and Interpreting the Selection

1. Madam Knight finds many features of her trip frightening. Sometimes she relieves her fears by indulging in fantasies, "diverting thoughts."
 - a. What specifically about the journey frightens her?
 - b. What are some of her "diverting thoughts," especially about the moon?
2. Being a Boston schoolteacher, Madam Knight sees things as might a well-educated city person.
 - a. What signs of her reading appear in her journal?
 - b. How does her city upbringing affect the way she sees "Bumpkin Simpers" and "Joan Tawdry"?
 - c. What does she find unusual about the behavior of people in New Haven and New York?

Focus on Narrative Writing

Making Language Vivid

The more vivid your language is, the more you can expect to catch and hold your audience's interest. Use **precise verbs** to show actions. Notice, for example, Sarah Kemble Knight's specific, colorful verbs in the second paragraph on page 42: *venture*, *terrified*, *saluted*, *mounted*, *stem*, and *tormenting*. Describe objects and people with **sensory images**, details that appeal to the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Knight uses sensory language in the first paragraph (page 42) to describe a meal. A third way to make your language more vivid is to use **dialogue**, the way Knight reports conversation at the merchant's house (page 46).

Locate an illustrated brochure or travel article that describes a trip or tour to an exotic foreign country. Make a list of all the vivid verbs and sensory images in the description. Then create some dialogue to go with the illustrations. Save your writing.

Sarah Kemble Knight (1666–1727)

from **THE JOURNAL OF MADAM KNIGHT** (Pages 41–48)

Understanding the Writer and Her Background

1. Why was it unusual in 1704 for a woman to make a business trip from Boston to New York and back?

Understanding the Selection

2. In the first entry in her journal, Madam Knight describes an episode that fills her with terror. Briefly retell that episode in your own words.

3. What purpose is served by Madam Knight's thoughts on the sight of the moon?

4. Briefly summarize Madam Knight's impressions of (1) marriage customs in New Haven and (2) religious customs in New York.

NAME _____

CLASS _____ DATE _____

STUDY GUIDE—CONTINUED

5. From what point of view did Madam Knight observe her experiences on the journey from Boston to New York?

Understanding Vocabulary

6. On page 46, find the adjectives listed below. Determine the meaning of each word from its use in context. Then use the glossary to check that meaning. On the lines below, use each word in an original sentence that reveals its meaning.

aromatic _____

compacted _____

commodious _____

Writing and Responding to Literature

7. Paraphrase the following passage so that it is easier to understand.

I cannot express the concern of mind this relation set me in: no thoughts but those of the dangerous river could entertain my imagination, and they were as formidable as various, still tormenting me with blackest ideas of my approaching fate—sometimes seeing myself drowning, otherwhiles drowned, and at the best like a holy sister just come out of a spiritual bath in dripping garments. (Page 42)

**Selection
Test**

NAME _____

CLASS _____ DATE _____ SCORE _____

Sarah Kemble Knight from *The Journal of Madam Knight*

(Pages 41–48)

Directions: Write the letter of the best answer to each question. (10 points each)

1. Sarah Kemble Knight left Boston in early October and reached New York
 - a. two weeks later
 - b. the following March
 - c. in November
 - d. in December

1. _____
2. On her first night of travel, Knight wrote a poem about the moon in which she called the moon
 - a. Fair Cynthia
 - b. Glorious Luminary
 - c. Kind Conductress
 - d. Nereidees

2. _____
3. The “Nereidees” she mentions in her poem are
 - a. sea nymphs
 - b. Spanish wines
 - c. moon craters
 - d. saddlebags

3. _____
4. The first stop on her trip from Boston to New York was
 - a. the Bowery
 - b. Greenwich Village
 - c. New York City
 - d. New Haven

4. _____
5. According to Knight’s journal, the young men in New Haven married before they were
 - a. thirty years old
 - b. twenty years old
 - c. twenty-five years old
 - d. eighteen years old

5. _____
6. Knight suggests that the manners of the New Haven country fellow and his girl are
 - a. sophisticated
 - b. aristocratic
 - c. polished
 - d. boorish

6. _____
7. Which of the following events occurs first in Knight’s journal?
 - a. She meets Mr. Burroughs.
 - b. She arrives in Connecticut.
 - c. She crosses a river in a canoe.
 - d. She arrives in New York.

7. _____
8. Which of the following words does Knight *not* use to describe New York?
 - a. Compacted
 - b. Odious
 - c. Pleasant
 - d. Commodious

8. _____
9. Knight says that most New Yorkers belonged to
 - a. the Methodist church
 - b. the Quaker religion
 - c. the Baptist church
 - d. the Church of England

9. _____
10. In 1704 New Yorkers spent their leisure time sleighing to
 - a. the Bowery
 - b. Battery Park
 - c. upstate New York
 - d. the Bronx

10. _____